5: Pollard M-5 (no date) 1921 AE4 Lolo AE4

CHAPTER XI

THE FARMSTEAD IN THE VALLEY

576 THE lantern display was finished about midnight. Soon after we lay down on the floor and went to sleep. The night was very cold, and some of the people felt it a good bit. The next morning we were up at half-past six. Going outside, we found the whole country-side white with snow. The rule among these hill-people is that if you have had supper at a house you leave before breakfast the next morning. There is always one meal free for any who come, but, except in special cases, not more. Following the custom of the country, we left early, hoping to get breakfast somewhere farther on. 313 439 We passed a number of villages on our way and saw many fine trees. One who only travels on the main roads of Yunnan sadly misses the trees. Sylvan scenery, of which Lord Beaconsfield rightly said one never tires, is almost absent. Huge cliffs, limestone rocks, rushing mountain torrents abound, but these do not make up for the absent trees. Here in Nosuland we found many trees of great size. The war against these trees has also commenced. Many of them are cut down and sawn into huge, heavy coffin boards, which are carried down to the Yangtse and then sold to the Chinese. They are then transported to the busy centres of [764] North Yunnan, and command heavy prices. As the Nosu go in for cremation and set no store by these insanely heavy coffins, the trees have had a long respite. Now the Chinese have denuded their own hills of most of the large trees they

5: Pollard M-5 (no date) 1921 AE4 Lolo AE4

have gone farther afield, and are willing to pay the Nosu very generously for the wood grown north of the Yangtse. 313 439

Why the Chinese set such store by these huge, ungainly coffins one does not know. Why a dead man should be happier in a coffin with sides in parts a foot thick rather than in one with sides an inch thick passes a Westerner's comprehension. And when you see countrymen toiling up the seven or eight thousand feet from the river to the hills near Chaotung, bearing on their backs huge boards of immense weight, which tire them and bring on premature old age, you wish that the Chinese in their funeral customs were not so bound down in slavery to old-age customs. Possibly with the changes which are now rapidly coming over the land reform in burial matters may make some headway. We were sorry to see this demand for large coffins causing the cutting down of many of the finest trees in the woods of Nosuland.

With boots and stockings soaking, through walking in the snow, we at last reached a farmhouse in the See-tieh Valley. Here lived an old man well versed in Nosu folk-lore and tradition. We had arranged to stay a few days at his farm, hoping to gather a lot of valuable information about the hill-people. The old man's name was Ah-Pooh, and his wife's name was Ah-Hleh. A number of men were waiting at the outer gateway of the farm, and as we passed by they roared with laughter at the strange black-bear being who had come to be a guest at Ah-Pooh's home. We also joined in the laughter, and felt quite safe with folk who could laugh so heartily. I had never suspected that a suit of black clothing would cause such fun. If one could always rely on such a suit producing 574

7: Clarke M-3 (no date) 1911 AE5 Miao
Lolo AE4

or cheese. This, we think, is a great pity as there is plenty of unoccupied land, such as it is, which they can use as pasturage for their cattle. The children drive the cattle and sheep out to pasture on the hill-sides early in the morning, and stay to mind them till the time for the morning meal, when they drive them home again. During the middle of the day the cattle are penned up in the hovel, and let out to pasture during the afternoon, and driven home again as it is getting dark. There is plenty of fuel about, and the tenants can go to the wood and bring home as much as they like. Moreover, there are no game laws.

There are wild beasts about, wolves, foxes, leopards, wild boars, and even tigers; and people, especially children, are not infrequently devoured by them. Some of the Miao are great hunters. They use spears, crossbows, and poisoned arrows. I think the poison they use is aconite. When they wound a leopard or tiger with their poisoned arrows, they allow the animal to get away, and later go after it. They generally find it dead or dying.

We have already mentioned Miao superstitions and legends, and here we shall only relate what we know of No-su religious beliefs and legends. These are the more difficult to learn